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# MENE, TEKEL, PERES, AND THE FEAST OF BELSHAZZAR.

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Among the enigmatical passages of the Old Testament, there is possibly none which has stimulated to a higher point the curiosity of the exegetes, and provoked more numerous and more divergent comments than the one which contains, in the account of the feast of Belshazzar, these three mysterious words, popularized in the form Mene, Tekel, Peres,—a form which has originated from the ancient Greek and Latin versions of the Aramean Book of Daniel.

Without making a pretence of giving a decisive solution of this philological problem, I wish to try to place it in new terms by introducing an element which—as far as my knowledge goes—has not yet been considered, and which seems to me to play an essential role. I hasten to say that the considerations which are to follow are independent of the question yet under discussion, of the real date of the Book of Daniel, of its historic value and of the environment to which the author may have belonged; they will preserve their import, if indeed any be accorded them, in each of the more or less plausible systems between which, in that respect, modern criticism is divided.

## I.

Every one recalls the truly thrilling picture in which the biblical writer paints for us this supernatural manifestation of divine judgment followed, with so brief delay, by its execution.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of a grand feast, the sumptuousness of which has passed into a proverb, Belshazzar, king of Chaldea, gives the order to bring the vessels of gold and silver of Jehovah, taken from the temple in Jerusalem by his father Nebuchadnezzar, and in company with his guests, male and female, drinks from them in honor of the gods of Babylon. At this moment he sees a hand appear before the candelabra which lighted this impious orgie, a hand which writes upon the plaster of the wall of the hall some incomprehensible words. Terrified by this prodigy, the king summons immediately his astrologers and diviners, and promises them the highest rewards if they succeed in deciphering this inscription and furnishing the interpretation. But all the science of the Chaldean Magi remains in default. The queen arrives and counsels the king to summon Daniel, who had given proof of his wisdom under Nebuchadnezzar, and had been made by him chief of the astrologers and diviners.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel v.

Daniel is brought before the king ; and after recalling the misdeeds of Nebuchadnezzar and sharply admonishing the son, worthy of him, despiser of Jehovah, he continues in these words :

24 Then was the part of the hand sent from before them, and this writing  
25 was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed,

מֵנָה מֵנָה תְּקֵל וּפְרָסִין

měnē mēnē tēqēl û-pharsîn

26 This is the interpretation of the thing : Měnē, God hath numbered (mēnāh)  
27 thy kingdom, and brought it to an end. Tēqēl, thou art weighed (tēqiltā)  
28 in the balances, and art found wanting. Pērēs, thy kingdom is divided<sup>1</sup>  
(pērīsāt) and given to the Medes and Persians (Pārās).

Upon this Belshazzar accords to Daniel the promised rewards (though the latter, according to the account, had begun with a refusal of them); that very night he is slain, and Darius the Mede seizes the kingdom.

It is clearly shown from this story that the task incumbent on the interpreter of these prophetic words was double ; it was a question first of deciphering, then of explaining them. It would be idle and, in any case, it will not be in my plan to search for what cause the decipherment presented a particular difficulty. Was it a question, in the thought of the author, of an unknown writing, or simply of an unaccustomed disposition of known characters ? The rabbins are pronounced in favor of the second hypothesis and, giving free rein to their imagination,<sup>2</sup> have assumed that either the characters belonged to a cryptographic alphabet *athbash*, i. e., one in which the first letter has as its equivalent the last :

{ ט	מ	ח	ג	ר	פ	ך	ד	א	ת	ט	י
{ י	י	ס	ר	פ	ו	ל	ק	ת	א	נ	מ

Or that the letters, arranged in three lines in a sort of table, had to be read vertically and not horizontally :

ס	ו	ת	מ	מ
י	פ	ק	נ	נ
י	ר	ל	א	א

Some seem to have also thought of a real anagram,<sup>3</sup> which may be represented thus :

ניסרפולקתאנמאנ

I do not insist upon these more or less dangerous conjectures, the last of which is perhaps the most plausible, since it is more simple than the first and has the advantage over the second that it might have appeared in the manuscripts without breaking in an offensive manner the regularity of the lines.

<sup>1</sup> Or, as some critics translate, *broken, destroyed*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. Levy, *Neuhebraeisches und Chaldaeisches Woerterbuch*, under the words יִשָּׁת, אֶרֶן and אֶלְרִין.

<sup>3</sup> See Levy, *op. cit.*, § 5, אָנִם.

I only mention them as a matter of curiosity, although we shall be able further on to draw from them an indirect argument. I will devote myself exclusively to the question of interpretation. A circumstance by which we cannot fail to be struck, but to which we possibly do not accord all the importance which it merits, is that the interpretation attributed to Daniel does not agree rigorously with his decipherment.

This agreement exists only in the Greek and Latin translations. These translations in verse 25, after the phrase "this is the writing that was inscribed," substitute for the five words of the original Aramean text *mě nē mē nē tē qē l* u-phārsîn, the transcription *μάνη, θεκελ, φάρες, mane, thekel, phares*, of the three words *mē nē, tē qē l, parsîn* which stand only in verses 26, 27 and 28 of the original, verses which have for their object the giving of the signification.

Hebraists, guided by the Massoretic vocalization, which is not, be it said in passing, without singular anomalies,<sup>1</sup> are generally agreed in recognizing that the five words of verse 25 ought to be rendered literally as participles, numbered, numbered, weighed and they are dividing;<sup>2</sup> accepting as well founded this translation which, even from the grammatical point of view, does not escape from all criticism, and which yields in any case, we must confess, a phrase partly incoherent, we see that the interpretation given by Daniel to the following verses, regards neither the repetition of the first word *mē nē*, nor the plural form of the last word *parsîn*, preceded by the conjunction ׀ "and." The biblical writer is content to draw from this whole the three essential words, in attaching them to a uniform grammatical type.

*mē nē* "numbered"

*tē qē l* "weighed"

*pērēs*<sup>3</sup> "divided."

He then draws from it, by one of those *jeux d'esprit*, of which the Bible offers many examples, the significations appropriate to the situation which he has in view.

He proceeds for this purpose with a mechanical method, so to speak, which is seen clearly by this simple synoptic table:

INTERPRETATION OF THE SECOND DEGREE.	EXPLANATION OF THE FIRST DEGREE.	WORD TO BE EXPLAINED.
והשלמה	מנא-אלהא מלכותך	מנא 1
והשתכחת חסיר	תקלתא במאזניא	תקל 2
ויהיבת למדי ופרס	פריסת מלכותך	פרס 3

<sup>1</sup> Particularly for the word תקל, which, it is supposed, ought to be equivalent to תקיל. Other commentators, without stopping at the vocalization, translate the words as verbs in the Preterite and present Participle: *numeravit, numeravit, appendit et dividunt*. (Buxtorf, *Lex. s. v.* תקל.)

<sup>2</sup> Or "they are breaking," according to some exegetes. I believe that the sense of dividing is preferable, and my theory tends, as will be seen, to confirm this last meaning of the root פרס.

<sup>3</sup> The same reservation is to be made on the vocalization of this word as upon that of *tē qē l*.

- |               |   |  |   |  |
|---------------|---|--|---|--|
| 1. NUMBERED : | { | God has <i>numbered</i><br>thy kingdom           | } | and has finished it.                                       |
| 2. WEIGHED :  | { | thou hast been <i>weighed</i><br>in the balances | } | and hast been found wanting in<br>(weight).                |
| 3. DIVIDED :  | { | thy kingdom has been<br><i>divided</i>           | } | and has been given to the Mede<br>and the <i>Persian</i> . |

This rational analysis shows clearly that every one of the three parallel phrases is divided into parts rigorously symmetrical :

1. The word to be explained.
2. A literal explanation of the word, presenting this word at the head of the phrase, in different grammatical states.
3. A second interpretation following the first, a kind of paraphrase, at once larger and more precise, of the literal explanation to which it is uniformly attached by the conjunction "and." The last word *peres*, furnished even to the author an opportunity for a veritable *doublet* applying in the explanation of the first degree to the verb *peras*, "to divide," and in the interpretation of the second degree, to the name of the "Persians" (*Pārās*). Why, therefore, does not verse 25, giving the decipherment of the mysterious inscription, contain in place of the words *mēnē*, *mēnē*, *tēqēl u-pharsin*, purely and simply the three words *mēnē*, *tēqēl*, *pērēs*, upon the interpretation of which verses 26, 27 and 28 exclusively revolve?

This question is so natural that the ancient Greek and Latin translators have made no scruple of replying in their way by modifying, as we have seen, the original text of verse 25 in the sense indicated by the logic. They may besides have been influenced by another motive, if the manuscript which they had before their eyes presented the characters composing the phrase in an odd disposition, difficult of reproduction, and similar to those pointed out above, of which the rabbins speak.

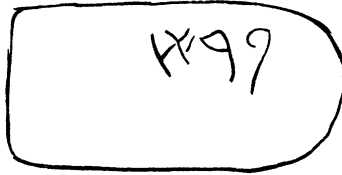
However that may be, this divergence between the deciphered and the interpreted text can scarcely be conceived unless one admits that the biblical author had to do, not with simple words, but rather with a given and prescribed phrase consecrated by tradition, from which he must produce, by alliterations and allusions, certain significations adapted to the circumstances which preoccupied him, i. e., the coming of the Persians.

I will return immediately to this point, which is properly the knot of the question, and, following the example of the author himself, and of the ancient translators, will occupy myself, for the moment, only with the three words *mēnē*, *tēqēl*, *pērēs*, separated from their connection, reserving for later consideration the entire phrase of verse 25.

## II.

In 1878, in the course of an epigraphic mission, which had been entrusted to me by the Minister of Public Instruction on account of the Committee of the

*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, I had occasion to study in the British Museum the important set of bronze lion weights, from Nineveh, many of which have bilingual inscriptions in Assyrian and Aramean. One of these weights particularly attracted my attention. It is the one upon which is engraved an Aramean word, up to that time generally read קדש, "holy," which was considered an indication of a "weight of the sanctuary" in opposition to the standard weight. A minute examination convinced me that the word ought to be read, in reality, פרש paraš or paras "half, moiety."



This is confirmed by the casts brought back by me at that time, which have been placed in the cabinet of the Committee of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, thus permitting a control of the exactness of this reading.<sup>1</sup>

The lion which bears this inscription having weight perceptibly equal to that of a half of the light mina, it was evident that we had to consider this word paraš, "half," directly as the denomination itself of a fixed ponderal quantity, viz., the half-mina.<sup>2</sup> The Assyrian and, as we shall presently see, the Hebrew-Aramean agree in confirming this reading. Immediately a comparison arose in my mind, that we find in the set of weights from Nineveh, engraved in Aramaicising characters, in a language approaching to Hebrew, the three names of weights,

מנה mānē the mina.  
 שקל<sup>3</sup> šéqəl, the shekel.  
 פרש phārāš, the half-mina.

and that by a coincidence, truly singular, these three names correspond in a remarkable manner to the Aramean words of the text of Daniel, mēnē, tēkēl, pērēs. The slight orthographical differences presented by the Aramean forms are all rigorously explained by the well known peculiarities of Aramean compared with Hebrew :

<sup>1</sup> M. Oppert had already recognized the true reading of this word, applied also to Assyrian measures of length, as is evident from the following passage of his memoir upon the Assyrian standard measures and weights: "The words paras and sinip are found transcribed in Aramean characters" (*Journ. Aasiat.*, 1874, t. II. p. 431).

<sup>2</sup> The light mina is half of the heavy mina.

<sup>3</sup> The word appears in the plural on the weights שקלו.

The ה of מנה becomes normally א = מנא<sup>1</sup> mānā.

The ש of שקל “ “ ת = תקל<sup>2</sup> tēqal.

The ס of פרס “ “ ס = פרס<sup>3</sup> pēras.

From this it was only a step to conclude that the names of weights<sup>4</sup> designating the mina, the shekel and the paraš, or half-mina, might play a role in the text of Daniel. This step I hesitated for a long time to take, and at first contented myself with communicating to some savants a conjecture which pressed and still presses more and more upon me. I do not believe that I ought to withhold it further from criticism, and after having submitted it, to the best of my ability, to the examination of reason, I now give it to criticism, in the hope that perhaps some part of it may be accepted, even if it be not received with all its consequences

### III.

I think it will be admitted without much difficulty that the three words of Daniel can correspond term by term to the three names of weights.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the phonetic equivalences noted above, even the paronomasias, in which the biblical author delights, come to the support of this identification, and serve as an acknowledgment of it. In fact he aims expressly, in his allegorical interpretation, at the roots

מנה or מנא “to number,”

שקל or תקל “to weigh,”

פרש or פרס “to divide,”

to which every one attaches without hesitation the Semitic names of the *mina*, the *shekel* and the *pharaš* (peras) or *half-mina*.

If, then, it were truly a question of these three isolated words, if by misfortune the Aramean original of Daniel had been lost and this book had come down to us, like several others of the Old Testament, only by means of the Greek and Latin versions; if, consequently, the phrase was presented to us in the abridged state to which these versions have reduced it, Μάνη, θεκελ, φάρες,<sup>6</sup> *Mane, thekel,*

<sup>1</sup> The form מְנָא, *mina*, exists in Aramean.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Aramean תְּקֵל, *shekel*.

<sup>3</sup> פְּרָס is the *half-mina* in Aramean פְּרַס שֶׁל מִנָּה, Buxtorf, *Lex. Chald.*, s. v.). In the language of the Talmud, מִנָּה וּפְרָס, *a mina and a peras*, means *a mina and a half*. In various other passages, given in *Neuhebr. und Chald. Woerterbuch*, Levy's s. v. פְּרַס, these two weights are opposed to one another in a way that leaves no doubt of the value of the pērās = *half-mina*.

<sup>4</sup> Of weights or of money; for it must not be forgotten that this is all one in the Semitic languages.

<sup>5</sup> It might be well to note that Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, X., 11, 3) renders the three words of Daniel not by verbs, but by substantives, ΜΑΝΗ = ἀριθμός *number*; ΘΕΚΕΛ = σταθμός *weight*; ΦΑΡΕΣ = κλάσμα *fragment*.

<sup>6</sup> It is to be noted, now, that the Greek transcription implies for these words a vocalization differing, in certain points, from that of the Massoretic text, and approaching that which my explanation tends to substitute for it. (See the end of note.)

*phares*. If, therefore, we had to deal only with these three isolated words, the explanation would offer scarcely any difficulty. It is true also that in this case the coincidence would have only a relative interest, and could be considered an occurrence curious enough, but, after all, of restricted importance.

But the original of Daniel has been happily preserved, and the original gives us, in verse 25, not only the *three* words in question, but a phrase of *five* words, where they play a role which remains to be discovered.

We must inquire whether the introduction of this new element of information in the study of the phrase of verse 25 is not of such a nature as to clear up the whole of this obscure text, and to make us see it in a light very different from that in which it has been habitually regarded up to this time.

Let us admit, for a moment, laying aside the Massoretic vocalization, to which even the most scrupulous philologists are obliged here to do some violence, that it is necessary to read these three isolated words of verses 26, 27, 28, not *mēnē*, *thēqēl*, *pērēs*, but *mānā*, *tēqāl*, *pērās*, i. e., *mina*, *shekel* and *half-mina*, and let us apply this reading to the same three words in the phrase of verse 25. We shall obtain then for this phrase, *mānā*, *mānā*, *thēqāl*, *u-phārsîn*, "mina, mina, shekel and half-shekel."

We establish at first that, while the words designating respectively *mina* and *shekel* are in the singular, that which designates *half-mina* is in the plural, פֶּרַסִין *parsîn*, or *pērāsîn*, the regular plural of *pēras*, פֶּרַס. This implies already between the first and last word of the phrase, between the *mina* and the *half-mina*, a significant opposition which ought to serve us as a first luminous point in the darkness in which we are gropingly advancing. But we do not yet hold the key of the riddle.

The literal translation "*mina, mina, shekel and half-minas*" does not give us a sense much less disconnected than that of the received translation. It has, however, the advantage over this of showing us some elements pertaining to an order of ideas clearly characterized. But we do not yet see in what manner these elements ought to be combined, in order to form a logical whole, a connected, moving, living phrase. We possess them, so to speak, in a static state, it remains for us to put them in a dynamic state, and to discover whether these words, in place of being simply placed side by side, are not in reality united among themselves by grammatical functions. In this consists the real problem for solution.

Although in Aramean several substantives may follow each other in an enumeration without the interposition of the conjunction "and," employed in similar cases in Hebrew, it is scarcely probable, *a priori*, that this succession of words here constitutes a simple statement of weights, such as: "a mina, a mina, a shekel and some pheras."



## IV.

Let us pause at the first word: *Mānā*. It is twice repeated: *Mānā, mānā*. Is this, then, a simple repetition, *mina, mina*, with which we have to do, a rhetorical figure, or, on the contrary, a phenomenon of syntax?

In Aramean and in general in the Semitic languages, the repetition of the same substantive, without the intervention of any other word, is a grammatical process capable of expressing different things: e. g., the idea of a great quantity, when the substantives are in the plural,—**בִּירִין, בִּירִין** *pits, pits*, i. e., “nothing but pits,” Gen. XIV. 10; but here *mānā* being in the singular, the idea of plurality ought, it seems to me, to be put aside; or the idea of partition, which is expressed by our word *every*,—**עֲרָא עֲרָא** *flock, flock*, i. e., “every flock by itself,” Gen. XXXII. 16; **עַמָּא עַמָּא** *people, people*, i. e., “every people;” **גְּבַר גְּבַר** *man, man*, i. e., “any man,” Num. IX. 10, etc.; or moreover an idea of distribution, an idea connected with the preceding,—**דֵּנַרְיָא דֵּנַרְיָא** *denarius, denarius*, i. e., “every one a denarius;” **אֶחָד אֶחָד** *two, two*, i. e., “two by two;” **מֵאָה מֵאָה** *hundred, hundred*, i. e., “by hundreds,” Mark VI. 40, etc.; finally, an idea of diversity,—**עֲוִיל עֲוִיל** *evil, evil*, i. e., “different evils,” Mk. II. 17; **לִשָּׁנָא לִשָּׁנָא** *tongue, tongue*, i. e., “different tongues,” John V. 4; Acts X. 46, etc. In all these cases the repeated substantive remains in the singular. This is the case in this passage. We might, then, endeavor to see if these words **מִנָּה מִנָּה** *mina, mina*, would not signify, in the phrase of Daniel, of which they form the commencement, something like “every mina, mina by mina, mina to mina, by every mina, for every mina,” or even “different minas.” But there is still another possible manner, and one well conformed to the Semitic genius, of construing these two consecutive words, *mānā, mānā*; that is, to regard the first as subject and the second as attribute of a small phrase where the verb *to be* is understood: *mina (is) mina*, i. e., *a mina (is) a mina*; as in Hebrew also **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי** *Jehovah my God*, i. e., “Jehovah is my God.” But we will leave provisionally this question in suspense, and reserving equally the word *tēqal*, which comes after, pass immediately to the last word of the phrase, **פַּרְסִין**, *parsîn*.

## V.

*Pārsîn*, or *phērāsîn*, has the proper form of a plural. But is it really a plural? The *peras* is, as we have seen, a “half-mina;” i. e., to make one *mina*, two *peras* are necessary. Given the presence, at the beginning of the phrase, of the word *mānā*, “mina” in the singular, nothing would be more tempting, if we had before us a Hebrew and not an Aramean text, than to ask if, in place of the plural, we have not here a dual, which is distinguished, as we know, only by a very slight vocalic variation, perceptible only in the Massoretic pointing; and if, in place of reading *parsîn half-minas*, we ought not to read *parsain two half-minas*.

It is true that Aramean seems to have allowed the dual to fall into disuse; and that is a serious objection. It has, however, preserved some traces of it which appear in the very language of the book of Daniel: **בְּיָדַי**<sup>1</sup> *in the two hands*, **בְּרַגְלָי**<sup>2</sup> *the two feet*, **בְּשֵׁנַי**<sup>3</sup> *the teeth* (considered as distributed in two rows). Syriac has preserved the form of the dual in the numerals: **ܬܬܐ** *two* (masculine), **ܬܬܐܬܐ** *two* (feminine), **ܬܬܐܬܐܬܐ** *two hundred*; and in the geographical name **ܡܝܨܪܝܡ** *Egypt*, an imitation of the Hebrew **מִצְרַיִם**. At any rate, there is a passage in Daniel<sup>4</sup> where it seems that the plural has at least the function of the dual:

**עַד-עֵדֶן וְעַדְנִין וְפֶלַג עֵדֶן**

*to a time, times and half a time.*

'Yddānīn *times* can only be the equivalent of 'iddānain *two times*,<sup>5</sup> in this phrase which, from the declarations of all the exegetes, contains the precise indication of a period of time numerically determined,—a year, two years and a half year, i. e., three years and a half.

Consequently, even according to the Massoretic vocalization of the word **פָּרְסִין** *parsin*, all the respect which it perhaps does not deserve, we find ourselves sufficiently protected by this precedent to attribute to **פָּרְסִין** the value of *parsain*, and to translate by *two peras* or *two half-minas*, if the context points in that direction.

## VI.

The word *parsin*, or *parsain*, is preceded in the text of Daniel by a **וְ**, representing, as every one admits, the conjunction *and*. If this word *parsin*, which closes the phrase, is indeed a substantive, it is to be supposed that the word *tēqēl*, to which it is bound by the conjunction, ought to be a word of the same nature as it, i. e., another substantive. We have already shown that *tēqēl* or *tēqal*<sup>6</sup> is a rigorously exact equivalent of the Hebrew substantive **שֶׁקֶל** *šéqēl*, designating the “shekel.” Under these conditions the phrase to be explained could strictly end **תִּקְלָא וּפְרָסִין**..... *a shekel and two pheras*.

But it will scarcely be perceived by what association of ideas a shekel (the word is in the singular), which is a very small fraction of a mina (the sixtieth or the hundredth, according to the system), is found in this brief phrase placed with two *peras*, the *peras* being half of the mina. Supposing even that it is a question of a simple enumeration of certain weights (which is scarcely probable), one

<sup>1</sup> Daniel ii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, vii. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, vii. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, vii. 25.

<sup>5</sup> In spite of the fact that, in the corresponding passage of chapter xii. (verse 7) of the Hebrew part of the Book of Daniel, **עַדְנִין** is servilely rendered by the plural **כְּנִיעָרִים**, and not by the dual **כְּנִיעָרִים**.

<sup>6</sup> This is the form which the segholate substantives of Hebrew take in Aramean: *késēph silver* becomes *kēsāph*.

would expect to find those weights enumerated in an order regularly increasing or decreasing,<sup>1</sup> and to see the lighter weight, the shekel, named after the p̄ras, as it is after the mina. How shall we escape this difficulty, which seems inextricable? It consists entirely in the presence of the ך, which, coupled with the word parsin, can certainly only be the conjunction *and*.

But is the ך really in its place? Does it really belong at the beginning of the word parsin, which follows it? Might it not perhaps belong to the end of the word tēqēl, which precedes? Ought we not to regard with caution the way in which our editions cut this phrase, a phrase which early became enigmatical. The usage of the *scriptio continua*, which is a proved fact in ancient biblical manuscripts, authorizes us to ask if the compact group of letters, in place of being cut into תקל פרסין, ought not to be תקל פרסין.

In this case the ך would become an integral part of the word tēqēl, and we should be freed from this conjunction *and*.

If there was any foundation for the hypothesis, which the rabbins, to explain the difficulty of decipherment, have put forth on the unusual disposition of the characters of the inscription, we could draw from them an argument to render still more admissible the very slight fault of the copyist. The biblical texts show greater ones than this.

We can see, in fact, that, for example, in the arrangement in three vertical columns explained above, the ך which is at the head of the fourth column is forcibly separated from תקל and placed near פרסין.

The anagrammatical arrangement which I have described as likewise possible, and which has perhaps really existed in certain ancient manuscripts, would also be able to favor the mistake.

## VII.

The ך being attached to the word תקל, the arrangement of the phrase is entirely changed. What can תקל be? If we were working upon a territory purely Hebrew, one could see in this ך the pronominal suffix *o* of the third person of the masculine singular joined to a substantive. Tēqēl could be taken rigorously

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<sup>1</sup> It is this which had prompted me to ask for a moment if peras, the proper sense of which is "half," did not designate, in place of the *half-mina*, a very small weight, such as the *half-shekel* (the Hebrew בָּקָע, bēqāʿ), or even the *obol*. But I do not believe that it is necessary to pause with this idea, the sense of *half-mina* for *peras* being too categorically established by the Assyrian and Aramean lexicons, and confirmed by the weight itself of the lion bearing the inscription paraš, a weight which is sensibly that of the weak *half-mina*. I ought to recall, however, that the Greek version of the LXX., in disagreement on this point with the version of Theodotion, followed by the Vulgate, and with the original Aramean itself, places these three words in an order which would be more conformed to the hypothesis of a regularly decreasing enumeration, Μάνη, Φάρες, Θεκέλ. But the version of the LXX. offers for the whole Book of Daniel such divergences from the original, it is so plainly removed from it, that it is not necessary to pay any attention to this variant, and that it would be imprudent to lend it here, against documents infinitely superior, an authority which, from antiquity, has been properly refused it.

in the general meaning of weight, which is the primitive sense of the name of shekel, although we should rather expect, in this case, the derived form מתקל (משהל) mathqāl. The expression would then signify, *his weight is two peras*, which, compared with the expression מנא מנא, considered as intended to mean *a mina is a mina*, would furnish a sense sufficiently plausible: "a mina is a mina; its weight is two peras" (in other words, two half-minas).

In place of being a nominal suffix, the ך restored to tēqāl could be also—continuing always to reason from the point of view of Hebrew—a verbal suffix, the verb תקל, tēqāl, the equivalent of שקל, šāqāl, signifying "to weigh." It would then be with a verb and not with a substantive which is derived from it, and which designates the shekel, that we have to do.<sup>1</sup> In this case the little phrase could be translated: "he has weighed it," or, "weigh it," according as we read תקלו in the Preterite or תקל in the Imperative.

But we must reject these hybrid forms. We have to deal with a text too thoroughly Aramean to permit us to treat the ך as a suffix in the Hebrew manner, replacing the Aramean forms ה and וּהי.<sup>2</sup>

In Aramean the ך of תקל could only be the product of a verbal inflection. Two forms are possible:

either תקלו "they have weighed;"  
or תקלו "weigh"

תקלו becomes then the direct object of פרסין.

If tēqāl is a verb in the second member of the phrase, one would be led to infer that in the first member מנא = mēnā is equally a verb and that there is a parallelism in the employment of the two correlative verbs mēnā mānā, tēqāl ū pārsain "he has counted a mina [and] they have weighed two peras. But it seems then that the two members of the phrase, thus opposed the one to the other, ought to be connected by the preposition ך, and; I deem it wise to resist the temptation to make the ך which is between tēqāl and pārsain serve for this purpose, making it leap over tēqāl, to place it before it, although by this adventurous expedient one would obtain a rather tempting balance mēnā mānā, (u-)tēqāl pārsain, "he has counted a mina and weighed two peras;" or in the Imperative<sup>3</sup> mēnē mānā, (u-) tēqul pārsain, "count a mina and weigh two peras." I should not like to go that far. Contenting myself with the

<sup>1</sup> The transcription Μάνη, θεκελ, φάρες, whatever may be the absolute value in the point of view of the original vocalization, implies at least a relative difference between these three words. Μάνη and φάρες, forming a group characterized by the vowel *a* of the first syllable, different from θεκελ, the first syllable of which has an *e* in place of an *a*. If the translator had considered תקל as of the same grammatical form as כנא and פרס, he ought, it seems, to have transcribed it θάκελ, and not θεκελ. One sees that this distinction corresponds plainly to that to which I find myself led in regarding כנא and פרס as substantives, and תקל as a verb.

<sup>2</sup> But we find in Daniel the form נ (chap. iv., verses 15, 16).

<sup>3</sup> כנא for כני or כני.

simple glide of the ך, I accept the reading תִּקְלוּ, a word which signifies "they have weighed" in the Preterite or "weigh" in the Imperative.

If this verb was in the Preterite, by making use of the different meanings, enumerated above, of which this reading מִנָּא מִנָּא, mina mina, is susceptible, we arrive at the following combinations:

1st By taking פֶּרְסִין as a plural: "mina by mina, they have weighed the peras."

2d By taking פֶּרְסִין as a dual: "for every mina, they have weighed two peras."

If the verb תִּקְלוּ was the Imperative, the combinations would be:

1st "mina by mina weigh the peras."

2d "for every mina weigh two peras."

3d "a mina is a mina, weigh two peras!"

It would be easy to multiply these combinations.

For example, accepting the conjecture which a number of qualified exegetes have supported, viz., that תִּקְלוּ is for תִּקְלוּ = תִּקְלוּ weighed, in the past Participle passive, one could translate, according to the Aramean rule which forms with the Participle Pē'il a real inflective Preterite passive, תִּקְלוּ (= תִּקְלוּ) by *have been weighed*, and consider the two members of the phrase as constituted thus:

מִנָּא מִנָּא *has been counted a mina, or*

מִנָּא מִנָּא *he has counted a mina;*

תִּקְלוּ פֶּרְסִין *have been weighed two peras.*

We may compare, in this respect, another passage of Daniel:<sup>1</sup>

דִּנְא יְתֵב וְסִפְרִין פְּתִיחוּ *the judgment was set and the books were opened.*

#### VIII.

But I pause in this track, where I leave to philologists more minute than I the task of pushing it further. It suffices me to point it out to them, and I shall content myself for the present with this conclusion: The two extreme and essential terms of the phrase in Daniel are two names of weights of which one is double the other, placed in relation by a third middle term, which is either a third name of weight (that of *shekel*), or the verb *to weigh*, from which the name of shekel is derived.

Across the last doubts which may still obscure the precise sense of the phrase so understood, one easily catches the movement and is conscious of the aroma of a sort of proverbial sentence, or popular saying, revolving upon the relation of the mina to the half-mina<sup>2</sup> and belonging perhaps to that order of

<sup>1</sup> vii. 10. Verse 24 of the passage which we are studying, furnishes itself an example of this construction, and that exactly with the inversion of the verb and subject which we have here: שְׁלִיחַ פָּסַח דִּי-יִדְא וְכַתְּבָא דִּנְא רְשִׁים, "the hand has been sent and this writing has been traced." The same, in verse 28: פְּרִיסַת מַלְכוּתֵךְ, "thy kingdom has been divided."

<sup>2</sup> Possibly by allusion to the difference between the light and the heavy mina, which ought to be divided the one and the other into two corresponding peras in the same proportional relation of 1 to 2.

ideas with which our modern locutions are connected, such as: "two make a pair," "two and two make four," "six of one and half a dozen of the other," etc. We may also compare for this image of isoropy, of equipoise, employed to express by analogy the idea of equivalence or the identity of two things, the Greek expressions: *Εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τιθέναι πλάστιγγα, ἰσόρροπον πλάστιγγα ἔχειν, ἰσόρροπον πλάστιγγα ταλαντεύεσθαι.*

It is very remarkable that these two words of *mānē* and *pērās*, "mina and half-mina," opposed, as here, to each other, are directly employed by the Talmudic authors in a metaphorical and proverbial manner well adapted to confirm that impression, at the same time coming to the support of the paremiological value which I propose to give them in the Book of Daniel. To the rabbins a son who is worth less than his father is a *pērās*, son of a *mānē*, **פרס בן מנה**; a son who is worth more than his father is a *mānē*, son of a *pērās*, **מנה בן פרס**; a son who is worth as much as his father, a *mānē* son of a *mānē*, **מנה בן מנה**.<sup>1</sup> It is not impossible that there was some allusion of this kind in the intention of the biblical author borrowing this aphorism from the wisdom of nations.

It is this which seems to come out of the long discourse with which Daniel introduces his interpretation. This discourse is divided into two parts: the first recalls the faults, followed by repentance, of Nebuchadnezzar, father of Belshazzar; the second, which sums up those of Belshazzar, begins with this apostrophe, "And thou, Belshazzar, his son, hast not humbled thy heart,"<sup>2</sup> etc., an apostrophe which emphasizes well the desire of the author to establish a parallel between the father and son.

## IX.

Some may perhaps consider it strange that this phrase written by a celestial hand on the wall of Belshazzar's festal hall, that this sentence of the destiny that ruled the lot of the last king of Chaldea, should be finally reduced to a simple saying, and to a saying so commonplace, so prosaic, that it might have been quite as well scrawled on any wall by the hand of the first malcontent, and might belong to this "wall" literature, not very lofty, which belongs to all times and to all peoples.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the examples in J. Levy, *op. cit.*, under the words **מנה** and **פרס**. So the two celebrated Moabites, the prophet Balaam and the king Balaq were both of them a "mina daughter (son) of a half-mina," since they were said to be greater than their respective fathers. Compare also in the same order of ideas, the proverbial locutions: **חלא בר חמרא** "vinegar son of the wine;" **ארי בן ארי** "lion, son of lion," and **ארי בן סעיל** "lion, son of the jackal."

<sup>2</sup> Verse 22.

<sup>3</sup> The exegetes who have believed that they recognized in the feast of Belshazzar certain personal allusions to the deeds of Antiochus IV., Epiphanes,—e. g., to the sumptuous and dissolute feasts given by Antiochus to Daphné (Hitzig, *Das Buch Daniel*, p. 78),—admit, without difficulty, I believe, the adaptation of some popular scoff directed at that bitter enemy of the Jews who had pillaged the treasure of the temple and who also, having taken refuge at Babylon after the check experienced at Elymais, had been chastised by the hand of the Persians, con-

To this objection it would be easy to reply by citing the analogy of certain oracles of pagan antiquity, which are distinguished by their strangeness and by their intended platitude. And besides, in the case of Daniel, is it not exactly this contrast, this disproportion between the littleness of the means and the grandeur of the intention, which was the better fitted to strike vividly the imagination? What, in fact, is the scope of this story in which the author proposes to show the fall of the empire of Chaldea? Belshazzar casts defiance at the God of Israel, who replies by a menacing prodigy. A hand sent from above writes upon the wall a phrase which all of the most skilled wise men of Chaldea are not able, with all their science, to read or to explain. Is this phrase, then, something impenetrable, something very abstract? Not the least in the world. It is all simply, as the Israelite prophet establishes, an adage of the common people, a proverb known to all. How easily does this prove the nothingness of this pretended science of the Magi, and gives the measure of this greatly vaunted wisdom which is held in check by so slight a difficulty. The author has a visible tendency to find in default this Chaldean science. In two places already, in the preceding chapters,<sup>1</sup> he has shown the weakness and ignorance of the Magi in their attempts at the interpretation of the two dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, the key to which Daniel alone was able to give. This time the demonstration is decisive. The Magi are not able to recognize in the mysterious inscription a saying which is upon every lip. First result. Yes, but from this profane saying, which, once deciphered, ought, it seems, to be understood by the whole world, Daniel goes on to draw a hidden divine meaning, and to obtain an effect so much the more considerable as it was unexpected. *Vox populi, vox dei*. He takes one by one the words which compose it, and, using one of the favorite methods of the Hebrew prophets, a double sense of these words, by paronomasia he causes some significations appropriate to the events in view to burst forth. The word which lends itself best to this was assuredly the last, *pārsîn* or *parsaîn*, which had the admirable advantage of making possible the most seducing equivocation upon the name of the Persians.

It is not bold to suppose that it is this word which has determined, among all the others, the choice of this saying as a fundamental theme of the prophecy relative to the coming of the Persians and the ruin of the empire of Babylon.

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considered as instruments of the divine vengeance (Fl. Josephus, *Antiq. jud.*, XII. 9, 1; Macc., I. 3, 31:6). Compare מְאִיִּם, *Mánn*, and the sobriquet 'Επιμανής, foolish, furious, into which the official surname of Antiochus, *Επιφανής*, the *illustrious*, was corrupted. In this case, the phrase taken as the text of the story of Daniel would be no longer, to speak properly, a proverbial sentence, but a kind of double-faced epigram, borrowed from the actual circumstances of the moment: The *mina* (Antiochus) has counted (and) the *peras* (Perses) have weighed (i. e., payed). It is known that the expedition, as the result of which Antiochus had to succumb, had for its object the recovering of the overdue taxes owing by the Persians. We must not lose sight of the fact that Syriac employs precisely the word ܡܢܐ to designate the tax of which the passage of the Book of Maccabees speaks (I. 3, 29).

<sup>1</sup> Chap. ii. and iv.

The whole of the fifth chapter of Daniel may be considered as the brilliant placing of this subject, to which it serves as a frame, and which remains, in the last analysis, the principal generating element of the whole piece.

## X.

I say, the principal element; for it is not the only one. As to the details of this scene, the actors who figure there, the attitudes they take, the roles they play, the accessories which constitute the scenery, it is, I believe, by the iconological method that we must seek an explanation. I understand by iconology, the generation of ideas by figured images, by plastic representations more or less arbitrarily interpreted. If one wishes to understand chap. v. of the Book of Daniel, he must read it again attentively in the light of certain representations of Egyptian and Chaldean origin, which have, in my judgment, exerted a preponderating influence on the mind of the author.

For Egypt, it is the representation, so popular upon bas-reliefs and in the illustrations of the Book of the Dead, of the judgment of souls weighed in the balance, or psychostasy, to which by a very natural association of ideas, the author must have found himself conducted; he has himself made a most direct allusion: "Thou hast been weighed in the balance," says he, "and thou hast been found wanting in weight."

For Chaldea, there is the representation which recurs very frequently upon the cylinders, and which is designated, in default of a better, under the conventional and, I believe, inexact name of "scene of initiation."

If we combine together these two plastic representations, we obtain the very model of the painting of the feast of Belshazzar, with all its details and all its incidents; the king seated upon a throne in the great hall of the feast and drinking from the sacred vessels; the banqueters; the inscription traced upon the wall; the candelabra lighting the scene; the Magi stupefied before the inscription; the queen presenting herself to the king; Daniel introduced in her presence explaining the inscription, and dressed in the insignia promised as his reward.

The best commentary which could be given of the fifth chapter of Daniel would be, on the one side, a vignette from the Book of the Dead, representing Osiris, king of Amenti, seated in state in the great hall of judgment; the forty-two judicial assessors and other infernal personages; the goddess Ma (Goddess of Justice) introducing the dead; Thot, the Lord of the divine words, the scribe of the divine justice, now inscribing, now pronouncing sentence; Horus and Anubis examining the weighed; and on the other side, a cylinder<sup>1</sup> showing us a god seat-

<sup>1</sup> Without pretending that the Assyrian scene called the scene of "initiation," is really congenious with the Egyptian scene of psychostasy, which is not, however, impossible, I cannot prevent myself from remarking that we find here two characteristic details which recall the Egyptian scene: the monkey, (the cynocephalus symbolizing the equilibrium of the balance), and the object in which M. Lenormant has seen a balance (of the steelyard type), and M. Menant an instrument of numeration, the staff of measuring, symbolizing justice (cf. the goddess Ma and her pen).



ed on a throne, holding in his hand a vase for libations; a grand candelabra; an inscription<sup>1</sup> engraved in the body of the scene; two persons,<sup>2</sup> one of whom presents the other to the god; other persons in different mysterious attitudes.

And besides, it is not only the episode of the feast of Belshazzar, but also other most prominent episodes of the Book of Daniel, the conception of which is explained to us by iconology: the two dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, the three young Hebrews in the furnace, Daniel in the den of lions; not to speak of the symbolic beasts which people the visions of the prophet and furnish the matter of his apocalyptic visions.

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<sup>1</sup> The cuneiform legend of the cylinder serving as a seal.

<sup>2</sup> One of them is at times certainly a woman.